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Byzantium's Apt Inheritors: Serbian Historiography, Nation-Building and Imperial Imagination, 1882–1941

ALEKSANDAR IGNJATOVIĆ

Between the second half of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century, Serbian national historiography underwent a continuous transition, from a romantic-idealistic to a more rigorous, critical approach and interpretation. It was determined by changes both of historical method and the goals of historical inquiry, particularly regarding controversial issues of medieval Serbian history. In contrast to the glorification of the past championed by the 'romantics', proponents of the 'critical school' advocated the conscientious study of historical sources and the search for historical truth. Nevertheless, certain subjects of Serbian national historiography question this established view. One of these is the complex relationship between medieval Serbia and Byzantium, frequently interpreted by historians not only as an intrinsic part of the nation's past and the essence of its cultural identity, but also as a convenient frame for examining and justifying contemporary national policies. In mainstream national historiography of the period between the Kingdom of Serbia (1882–1918) and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1941, after 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), Serbia's medieval past was set in an ambivalent perspective of simultaneous Byzantinization and de-Byzantinization. It was employed in various disciplines, including political and cultural history, archaeology, art and architectural history, but also went beyond scholarly discourse.

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The historiographical elaboration of Serbian-Byzantine relationships was based on a twofold interpretive strategy. On the one hand, historiography reinforced a sense of association of Serbs with Byzantium, which was explained by the profound influence of Byzantine customs, art and culture on medieval Serbia. On the other hand, Serbia's cultural and political emancipation and its differentiation from Byzantium were emphasized by historians at greater length and in greater detail. Consequently, the position of Byzantium became ambivalent in historiography, causing the Byzantine Empire to be simultaneously seen as 'national legacy' and expressed in terms of the nation's political adversary and cultural obstacle.

Nevertheless, historiographical narratives about the relationships between Serbia and Byzantium not only reflected different theoretical approaches and interpretive strategies, but also different ideological agendas. On the one hand, historiography took part in the construction of a national mythology of exclusiveness and the continuity of medieval Serbia as part of competing nationalistic discourses in the Balkans; on the other, it reinforced a set of ideological justifications of the nation-state as well as various supra-national political projects, ranging from a political programme for a 'Yugoslav empire' of 1867, to the interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It was in this sense that the interpretive perspectives on Byzantium made a tremendous impact not only on contemporaneous historical imagination as a re-enactment of the national past and the subsequent recreation of communal identity, but also on the justification of congruous, complementary or competing national narratives and ideological objectives.

The twofold historiographical process of the simultaneous cultural association of medieval Serbian culture with that of Byzantium and its differentiation from it, seen in the context of ideological congruence between national and supra-national ideas, is the central topic of this article. Its aim is neither to give a comprehensive overview of the writings of Serbian historians on the history of the Byzantine Empire, nor to examine the history of 'Byzantine Studies' in Serbia. Nor is it to analyse the nature of relations between Serbia and the Byzantine Empire, which should be left to medievalists. Rather, this article will use discourse analysis to explore the major historical syntheses of the period in order to show how the historiographical construction of the connections between Serbia and Byzantium fitted into broader frameworks of nation- and state-building through the idea of the historical and cultural unification of the Serbs; how the historiography spurred the mythology of national authenticity and distinctiveness and how it reinforced the arguments about Serbia's historical

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rights, utilizing the ideas of imperial rule and 'core-nation' empire. The historiographic recovery of the Serbian medieval past ultimately cultivated a sense of national identification and encouraged political action. Serbian historians, regardless of methodological differences and lines of dissension, advocated the historical rootedness and validity of national expansionism, which sharply marked the political landscape of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Balkans. They also espoused the idea of the cultural superiority of Serbs and helped to elevate Serbian cultural and political identity in the global arena. The key argument of this article, however, is that historical interpretations of the past were not solely used to advance and reinforce the ongoing political agendas of Serbian elites, but that images of the past were made according to a foreseeable future of the nation. Elaborated theories and explanations of relationships between medieval Serbia and Byzantium were in conformity with the modern regime of historicity, which is a process that can be traced back to the earliest narratives of the so-called romantic school of historiography in the 1880s and can still be found in the 1940s.[1]

Byzantium and Serbia: interpretive patterns

Despite the apparently conflicted traditions of the romantic and critical schools in terms of historical sources and their interpretation,[2] as well as the advancement of Byzantine studies in turn-of-the-century scholarship, similar explanations of Serbian-Byzantine relationships and general attitudes towards Byzantium span the entire period in question. These explanations form a complex historiographical canon, based both on the Byzantinization and de-Byzantinization paradigm, developed and elaborated by at least three generations of historians. Despite being separated by time and political circumstances they share comparable

[1] On the modern regime of historicity, see François Hartog, 'Temps et histoire: "Comment écrire l'histoire de France?"', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 6, 1995, pp. 1219–36; see also François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expérience du temps*, Paris, 2003, pp. 11–30; Chris Lorenz, 'Unstuck in Time. Or: The Sudden Presence of the Past', in Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (eds), *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, Amsterdam, 2010, pp. 67–104.

[2] St.[anoje] Stanojević, 'O zadacima srpske istoriografije', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 10, 1903, 7, pp. 541–42. On this still understudied topic, see Sima Ćirković, 'Javljanje "kritičke istoriografije" na Velikoj školi i Univerzitetu', in *Univerzitet u Beogradu: 1838–1988: zbornik radova*, Belgrade, 1988, pp. 645–54; Srdjan Pirivatrić, 'A Case Study in the Emergence of Byzantine Studies: Serbia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World*, London, 2010, pp. 481–90 (p. 482); 'Ilarion Ruvarac: On Prince Lazar', in Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and Vangelis Kechriotis (eds), *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Modernism – Representations of National Culture*, 5 vols, Budapest and New York, 2010, 3, pp. 15–19.

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views. The first generation is best represented by the 'romantics' like Pantelija Panta Srećković (1834–1903), Ljubomir Kovačević (1848–1918) and Ljubomir Jovanović; the next generation of 'critical historians', such as Stojan Novaković (1842–1915), complemented and only partially revised the same canon, which was further elaborated by a succeeding generation of historians including Stanoje Stanojević (1874–1937) and Jovan Radonić (1873–1956), as well as Vladimir Ćorović (1885–1941) and Nikola Radojčić (1882–1964), to name but a few. The reasons for the longevity of this complex historiographical tradition, as this article will show, lie primarily in the constant negotiation of power relations in questions of national boundaries and the cultural recognition of Serbs in the context of both national expansion and the creation of a multi-national Yugoslav state.

While writing their accounts on the relationship between medieval Serbia and Byzantium, Serbian historians inevitably tackled the vexed problem of interpreting Byzantine Empire and civilization that not only preoccupied many European historians but also connoted a range of cultural values and had a wide resonance far beyond scholarly discourse. The historiographical approach to Byzantium that the Serbian national historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century employed was multifaceted, consisting of both positive and negative models of perception and interpretation. On the one hand, it reiterated a firmly entrenched and widely disseminated image of Byzantium as a civilization in constant decline, which was sometimes seen as a political and cultural antecedent of the similarly essentialized Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, there were different views on Byzantium, which was depicted as a sophisticated civilization, a repository of classical antiquity and true, original Christianity. The first, negativistic model of perception, entrenched in the eighteenth century, depicted Byzantium's chequered history as a process of continuous political decline and cultural deterioration. In a certain sense, this model was related to a set of traditional stereotypes about an impoverished, decadent and autocratic East, which can be traced back to Greek and Roman antiquity. Juxtaposed to the idea of a single, monolithic West, this essentialized image had an important place in the discourses of modernity and identity in many European national narratives. The Enlightenment's perception of Byzantium — best represented by Voltaire's or Montesquieu's condemnations of Byzantine history as 'worthless collections of declamations and miracles', a 'disgrace for the human mind',[3]

[3] Cited in Dimiter G. Angelov, 'Byzantinism: The Imaginary and Real Heritage of Byzantium', in Dimitris Keridis, Ellen Elias-Bursać and Nicholas Yatromanolakis (eds),

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or a 'tissue of rebellious insurrections and treachery' and a 'tragic epilogue to the glory of Rome'[4] — was crucial in the construction of this long lasting model of perception. Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) was perhaps its most noticeable manifestation which, while asserting Christianity's role in enfeebling the Roman Empire, fixed the image of Byzantium as a thousand years of decline, Oriental despotism and cultural ossification that heavily influenced succeeding scholars, as well as general attitudes to Byzantium.[5] Having been further driven by a Hegelian interpretive framework and notions of stages of development of the nation-state as embodiments of reason, this negative image became even more fixed throughout the nineteenth century. According to Hegel himself, the history of Byzantium — which he deemed as being incapable of cultural development and political evolution — reflected a 'disgusting picture of imbecility'.[6] 'Stultifying lack of originality'[7] in matters cultural, paired with autocracy and 'caesaropapism' in matters political, summarize the hallmarks of the Byzantine Empire's dominant perception of the whole period, best represented by Jacob Burckhardt's accounts on Byzantine hypocrisy and 'despotism, infinitely strengthen[ed] by the union of churchly and secular dominion'.[8]

From the second half of the nineteenth century, however, a growing interest in Byzantine history led to the creation of a new, avowedly rational and unbiased, albeit equally instrumental model of perception that was later institutionalized under the name of 'Byzantine studies', initially in Germany and France, and subsequently in England and Russia. Nevertheless, a shift in the perception, brought about the new discipline, retained the image of Byzantium haunted by the ghosts of 'Byzantinism', because Byzantine studies continued to keep its subject opposed to the idea of a single, monolithic West.[9] Byzantine departments were first established

New Approaches to Balkan Studies, Dulles, VA, 2003, pp. 3–21 (p. 3).

[4] Cited in J. B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered*, London and New York, 2003, p. 7.

[5] See Averil Cameron, *Byzantine Matters*, Princeton, NJ, 2014, pp. 1, 10–11; Johann P. Arnason, 'Byzantium and Historical Sociology', in Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World*, London, 2010, pp. 491–504.

[6] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, New York, 1956, p. 340. See also Hegel's essay, 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate', *Early Theological Writings*, trans. Eleanore R. Kroner, Philadelphia, PA, 1971, pp. 182–301.

[7] Cameron, *Byzantine Matters*, p. 10.

[8] Quoted in Diana Mishkova, 'The Afterlife of a Commonwealth: Narratives of Byzantium in the National Historiographies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania', in Roumen Daskalov and Tchavadar Marinov (eds), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans: Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies*, Leiden, 2015, pp. 118–273 (p. 143).

[9] Angelov, 'Byzantinism', p. 18; Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'What's So Byzantine About

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at universities in Munich (1898) and Paris (1899), where most Serbian medievalists who wrote about relationships between Serbia and Byzantium had studied, including Stanoje Stanojević, Vladimir Ćorović, Jovan Radonić, Dragutin Anastasijević and Božidar Prokić. Byzantine studies in Serbia were initiated at Belgrade University at the beginning of the twentieth century, after Božidar Prokić, a disciple of the leading German Byzantologist Karl Krumbacher, had informally introduced the history of Byzantium into the curriculum in 1893. A seminar for Byzantine Studies was formed in 1906, which was later developed and ramified.[10] Eventually, Serbian Byzantine studies became famous since the Russian-born and German-trained historian George Ostrogorsky settled in Belgrade in 1933.[11]

Yet there was another interpretive model simultaneously employed by the period's Serbian historiography which was a vital shoot of a profoundly rich tradition of imagining Byzantium as the only true successor to the Roman Empire and original Christianity. This model had flourished among Russian intellectuals in the nineteenth century, heavily influencing South Slavic elites, including the Serbian and Bulgarian.[12] Depicting Byzantium as a source of genuine Christian faith, Orthodox spirituality and custodian of both Roman imperial traditions and Greek antiquity, it presupposed an image that was an antipode to the rationality of the West. At the heart of this interpretive tradition was the question of Byzantine continuity and succession, which resonated not only among Russian intellectual and political elite in the discourse of the so-called 'Third Rome',[13] but also among competing Christian nations which fought for political and cultural primacy in the context of the then de-Ottomanizing

the Balkans?', in Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (eds), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2002, pp. 61–78. For the period's Serbian historians' accounts on Byzantium's understated status in European history and historiography, see Vladan Djordjević, *Grčka i srpska prosveta*, Belgrade, 1896, pp. 10–14; Nikola Radojčić, 'Garland E. Das Studium der byzantinischen Geschichte vom Humanismus and Jetztzeit', *Prilozi za jezik, književnost, istoriju i folklor*, 15, 1935, 1–2, pp. 292–95.

[10] Pirivatrić, 'A Case Study', pp. 481–90.

[11] See Ljubomir Maksimović, 'Razvoj vizantologije', in *Univerzitet u Beogradu: 1838–1988: zbornik radova*, Belgrade, 1988, pp. 655–71; Pirivatrić, 'A Case Study', pp. 485–86.

[12] See Dimitris Stamatopoulos, 'From *Vyzantism* of K. Leont'ev to *Vyzantinism* of I. I. Sokolov: The Byzantine Orthodox East as a Motif of Russian Orientalism', in Olivier Delouis and Petre Guran (eds), *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque moderne et contemporaine*, Athens, 2013, pp. 321–40.

[13] See Marshall Poe, 'Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a "Pivotal Moment"', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 49, 2001, 3, pp. 412–29.

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Balkans. Serbian historians of the period were heavily influenced by elaborated notions of Byzantine exceptionalism and cultural superiority, disseminated by Orthodox and nationalist circles in Russia as well as Pan-Slavists.[14] These notions were interwoven with romanticized interpretations of Byzantine culture originating both in Western and Russian scholarship. It was this complex image of Byzantium, made out of both positive and negative cultural stereotypes, an image which included different historiographical traditions and models of perception that fuelled the historiographic association of Serbia with the Byzantine Empire simultaneously with Serbia's historical differentiation from it. This dual perspective, as it will be shown, became instrumental in crafting complex ideological narratives and had topical resonance to Serbs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These narratives include the historical elaboration of Serbian national primacy in the Balkans justified by the nation's identity of a Byzantine successor, as well as of the cultural authenticity and exceptionality of the Serbian nation seen in terms of the contrast between culturally vigorous Serbs and declining Byzantines.

Serbia and Byzantium: cultural affinities and differences

The influence of Byzantium on the entire political and cultural life of medieval Serbia, especially during the reign of medieval Serbian kings of the Nemanjić royal lineage (1159–1367), was regarded by historians as a process which was often described in terms of political and cultural 'evolution towards Byzantium'.[15] This scheme was developed throughout the period, from Pantelija (Panta) Srećković's first accounts in the 1880s, through the second generation of historians including Stojan Novaković and Stanoje Stanojević, to the interwar historiography best represented by Vladimir Ćorović and Nikola Radojčić's works.[16] Stanoje Stanojević's *Vizantija i Srbi* (Byzantium and Serbs) published in two volumes in 1903

[14] Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855–1870*, Madison, WI, 2010, pp. 157–62, 183–91; Judith E. Kalb, *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890–1940*, Madison, WI, 2008, pp. 3–33. See also, David MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism*, Ithaca, NY, 1967.

[15] Stojan Novaković, 'Nekolika teža pitanja srpske istorije. Povodom knjige *Geschichte der Serbien, von Konstantin Jiriček, Gotha, 1911*', in *Godišnjica Nikole Čupića*, 31–32, Belgrade, 1912–1913, n.p. Reprinted in R. Samardžić (ed.), *Stojan Novaković: Iz srpske istorije*, Novi Sad and Belgrade, 1966, pp. 61–173 (p. 122).

[16] Pantelija S. Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda: Vreme kraljevstva i carstva (1159–1367)*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 1888, 2, pp. 524–25; Stojan Novaković, 'O ulozi vladaoca u državnom organizmu', in *Političke studije*, ed. Živojin M. Perić, Belgrade, 1908, p. pp. 303–13 (p. 307); Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, Belgrade, 1933, p. 154.

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and 1906 — although it had initially been planned as a ten-volume book — represents an apex of this particular interpretational tradition, which can be traced back to the mid nineteenth century and which continued to dominate the field well into the 1930s. In the introduction of the first volume of the book, Stanojević empathically declared that:

> The entire political and cultural life of Serbs was […] woven together with the history of Byzantium and so impregnated with Byzantine influences that one can say that Byzantine-Serbian relations during the first ten centuries of Serbian history made a very basis of the Serbian nation and its identity.[17]

In his later writings Stanojević reiterated the same question of Byzantinization, in terms of both political and cultural encounters between Byzantium and Serbs,[18] influencing generations of subsequent historians. Stojan Novaković further developed the same Byzantinization thesis, which was a historiographical trend that would reach its peak in the works of interwar Byzantinists, such as George Ostrogorsky and Vladimir Mošin; the latter elaborated three major 'waves of Byzantinization', namely, in the ninth, thirteenth and fourteenth century.[19] Nonetheless, some dissonant voices could also have been heard. For example, the historian Vladimir Ćorović, echoing Jovan Cvijić's theses about a cultural resilience of Serbs, wrote that profound Byzantinization of Serbia came only in the fourteenth century and not in the earlier periods. He elaborated this in the influential book *Istorija Jugoslavije* (History of Yugoslavia, 1933) as well as in his capital work *Istorija Srba* (History of Serbs) written in the late 1930s and fully published only in 1989.[20]

To justify statements about the widespread cultural and political influence of the Byzantine Empire, historians provided a variety of explanations. Despite close relationships between the Nemanjićs and the Papacy (both in Rome and Avignon), and the Serbian medieval kings' occasional flirtation with Catholicism, Serbia's historical orientation toward Orthodoxy and Byzantium remained, beyond any doubt, a key feature of Serbian identity inherited from the time of the missionaries,

[17] Stanoje Stanojević, *Vizantija i Srbi*, 2 vols, Novi Sad, 1903, 1, pp. ii–iii.
[18] Stanoje Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, Belgrade, 1910, p. 40.
[19] Vladimir Mošin, 'Srednjovekovna Srbija i vizantijska kultura', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 56, 1939, 5, pp. 354–65.
[20] Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Srba*, ed. Rade Mihaljčić and Radoš Ljušić, Belgrade, 1989, p. 158.

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Saints Cyril and Methodius.[21] Historians praised Byzantium as a superior civilization emulated by medieval Serbs; for Nikola Radojčić, whose *Razvitak srpske države u srednjem veku* (Development of the Serbian State in the Middle Ages, 1942) summed up the entire historiographical canon, Byzantium was the 'one and the only civilized country of its time' that had the closest kinship with Serbs.[22] Historians regarded Byzantine influences on 'Serbian national' culture as complete and indelible, witnessed by a variety of sources, from political organization to social and cultural formations.[23] A conspicuous example of this civilizational influence was the state's legislation and architecture of medieval churches and monasteries, a topic widely discussed not only among art historians and specialists[24] but political historians too.[25] What historians viewed as the 'enormous civilizational power of Byzantium' was utilized to portray the Serbs, the 'former Byzantine enemies', as Byzantium's cultural kinsmen, empowered by a noble culture. 'Anyone knowing our past', wrote Stanoje Stanojević in 1898, 'is certainly familiar with the fact that Byzantium enormously affected our nation in all aspects of its political and national life'.[26] One of Serbia's first trained Byzantologists, Božidar Prokić, declared that 'Byzantine history is a prerequisite for understanding the Serbian nation's cultural and political formation in the past',[27] encapsulating

[21] See Ljubomir Kovačević and Ljubomir Jovanović, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 1894, 2, pp. 77, 95–96; Vladimir Karić, *Srbija: opis zemlje, naroda i države*, Belgrade, 1887, pp. 263 ff; Stojan Novaković, 'Sloveni balkanski i njihova obrazovanost', *Zora*, 5, 1900, pp. 153–56; Stojan Novaković, 'Srednjovekovna Srbija i rimsko pravo', *Arhiv za pravne i društvene nauke*, 1, 1906, pp. 208–26 (p. 216); Jovan Radonić, *Prošlost Stare Srbije*, Belgrade, 1912, p. 12; *Istorija Jugoslavije*, p. 63; Jovan Radonić, 'Prošlost Stare Srbije', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 29, 1912, 10, pp. 754–80.

[22] Nikola Radojčić, *Razvitak srpske države u srednjem veku*, Belgrade, 1942, p. 115.

[23] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, pp. 109 f; Konstantin Jiriček, *Istorija Srba: politička istorija do 1537. godine*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 1911, 2, pp. 238, 298 ff; Radojčić, *Razvitak srpske države*. See also, Sima Ćirković, 'Der Hof der serbischen Herrscher: von der Burg zur Rezidenzstadt', in R. Lauer and H. G. Majer (eds), *Höfische Kultur in Südosteuropa*, Göttingen, 1994, pp. 74–85.

[24] The most conspicuous example is undoubtedly Andra Stevanović, 'Srpska crkvena arhitektura i njen značaj', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 8, 1903, 7, pp. 514–22; 11, 1903, 1, pp. 47–54; 11, 1903, pp. 123–33; 11, 1903, 3, pp. 213–25; 11, 1904, 4, pp. 295–303; 11, 1903, 6, pp. 445–55. See also, Svetozar Stojanović, *Srpski neimar*, Belgrade, 1912. A valuable collection of written sources on the topic is republished in Tanja Damljanović (ed.), *Valtrović i Milutinović. Dokumenti II – terenska gradja*, Belgrade, 2007.

[25] S. Novaković, 'Nemanjićke prestonice: Ras-Pauni-Nerodimlja', in Sima Ćirković (ed.), *Stojan Novaković: spisi iz istorijske geografije*, Belgrade, 2003 [1910], pp. 215–50; Karić, *Srbija*, pp. 297–99.

[26] Stanoje Stanojević, 'Grci i Srbi Vase Vujića', *Delo*, 5, 1898, 18, pp. 482–83.

[27] Božidar A. Prokić, 'Vizantijske istorijske studije u Francuskoj', *Delo*, 1906, 27, pp. 56–57 (p. 56).

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the historiographical canon that would dominate the field in decades to come. Importantly, historiography established a premise that the Serbs of the thirteenth and fourteenth century became one of Byzantium's key inheritors and principal 'developers' of its culture, which was an idea widely shared by historians not only throughout the period, but also much later.[28]

Yet simultaneously with the narratives of Serbo-Byzantine kinship and continuity, the relationships between medieval Serbia and Byzantium were interpreted through the lens not just of political conflicts but of cultural difference. In that sense, Serbian culture was simultaneously seen as a continuation of that of Byzantium's but also having been ennobled with a new, fresh and 'authentic' national element. This dual perspective framed a consequently established national narrative about Serbian culture and history, which were seen as a shoot grown from a dual Slavic-Byzantine heritage, a hybrid of Byzantine and Slavic cultures.[29] This means that the Serbian national historiography of the time purposely dismantled the heritage of Byzantium into two essentialized facets, which largely corresponded to the above-mentioned models of interpretation.

Byzantium's dual status in Serbian medieval history was conveniently reinforced by the interpretation of Emperor Stefan Dušan's Code of Law (1349, 1354),[30] as well as medieval monastic architecture, especially that of the fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Historiography developed theses about both the cultural and political independence of Serbia, which is a pattern that can be traced back to the earliest historiographical accounts of the so-called romantic period in the mid-nineteenth century, mirroring a common myth of national authenticity. Yet it was firmly established only with the writings of Pantelija Srećković in the 1880s and reiterated by succeeding historians. According to Srećković, the Serbian medieval ruler Stefan Dušan (king from 1331–45, emperor from 1346–55), determined to demolish Byzantium and to assert Serbia's primacy in the Balkans and created the 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire' (1346–55) which

[28] See, for instance, Svetozar Radojćić, 'Umetnost novog milenija', in *Odabrani članci i studije, 1933–1978*, Belgrade, 1982, pp. 62–64.

[29] Interrelations between the Byzantine and Slavic culture is part of the history of cultural transfer in general. This two-way process of influence was a widely discussed topic among early Byzantine scholars, from Ivan Ivanovich Skolov to Nicolae Iorga. On Sokolov and his legacy, see 'From *Vyzantism* of K. Leont'ev to *Vyzantinism* of I. I. Sokolov', pp. 321–40.

[30] Teodor Taranovski, *Dušanov zakonik i Dušanovo carstvo*, Novi Sad, 1926; Aleksandar Solovjev, *Zakonodavstvo Stefana Dušana, cara Srba i Grka*, Skopje, 1928.

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would replace Byzantium's decaying political and cultural organism.[31] This interpretational trope remained present in most of the subsequent historiographical accounts up to the 1940s.[32]

While writing on the 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire' historians discussed extensively the nature of Stefan Dušan's emulation of Byzantine imperial order and the exceptionally original character of his state, applying both negativist and positivist perceptions of Byzantium. 'The new, Serbian Empire', as Stojan Novaković put it, 'was nothing but a Slavic form of the Byzantine Empire!'[33] Jovan Radonić, too, justified the vigour and freshness of medieval Serbs which, although being under the thorough political and cultural influence of Byzantium, were clearly characterized by an 'independent creativity in literature, legislation and architecture', which made them the most advanced nation of the Balkans.[34] This long-lasting historiographical trend, which spanned the entire period in question, is best represented by Konstantin Jireček's accounts of medieval Serbs being simultaneously 'allies and rivals of the Byzantine Empire, yet never direct subjects of the Constantinopolitan emperors', neither political, nor cultural.[35]

The political resonance of these overlapping models of interpretation, which comprised the cultural association of medieval Serbia with Byzantium and its differentiation from it, was tremendous. Since the time of Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije* (The Draft, 1844), the first written treatise to outline Serbian territorial aims and political objectives that was kept secret for a long time,[36] Serbian elites were trying to expand their national territory and sovereignty, as well as conceptualize a nation-state, ideally characterized by the congruence of ethnic and political boundaries. However, modern Serbs (dubiously and ambivalently defined as a compact nation by a variety of shifting criteria, ranging from religion to language, depending on particular contexts) were widely scattered across regions that were considered 'national' and 'historical', living in cohabitation with other ethnic groups. In order to achieve the above-mentioned congruence

[31] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, p. 344.

[32] See *Istorija Jugoslavije*, pp. 162–63; *Vizantija i Srbi*, 2, p. 13; Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, pp. 145–46; 'Prošlost Stare Srbije', pp. 764–65; Stanoje Stanojević, 'Prilike u Vizantiji i na Balkanu za vreme prodiranja i naseljavanja Slovena', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 17, 1906, 8, pp. 583–98.

[33] 'Srednjovekovna Srbija i rimsko pravo', p. 221.

[34] *Prošlost Stare Srbije*, pp. 11–12.

[35] Konstantin Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, 4 vols, Belgrade, 1922 [1911], 1, p. v.

[36] It was first published in 1906 as 'Program spoljne politike Ilije Garašanina na koncu 1844. godine', *Delo*, 38, 1906, 1, pp. 321–36.

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and to unite the nation culturally, Serbian elites were frequently trying to substitute a simple concept of an ethnically defined nation-state with a more convenient political entity, based on a multi-national idea. This alternative concept, nevertheless, would have encompassed all the regions inhabited by Serbs, providing them with a leading role in a future state. This was the context in which national historiography helped justify these modern political attitudes, when the idea of a Serb-led supra-national state was developing simultaneously with the concept of an exclusively Serbian national state.

Throughout the entire period, historians encouraged ideas of Serbian political and cultural superiority in medieval history. This included the importance of the nation's state-crafting traditions in the context of Serbia's Piedmontal role within the South Slav national question. The usual tropes of modern Serbia, which was 'called upon to become a centre of strength in the battle for national survival not only among Serbs, but all South Slavs',[37] as Vladimir Jovanović put it in 1885, were intertwined with enduring and effective stereotypes of a culturally separate Serbian nation, which 'had achieved a greatly superior degree of cultural development' already in the Middle Ages.[38] Even those firmly opposed to romantic historiography, like Stojan Novaković, were engaged in a process of historical legitimization of Serbian statecraft. 'Serbs were the only Yugoslav tribe within the realm of the Byzantine Empire', wrote Novaković in 1880, 'which firmly opposed the Greeks, holding a banner of national independence. This is the reason why the Serbian state, for the first time […] embarked on expansionism and brought freedom and a national state to the neighbouring tribes'.[39] As the ideas of 'bringing freedom' to the neighbours undoubtedly resonated in contemporary nation- and state-building context in the pre-First World War era, many historians were further developing similar theses about a multiethnic medieval Serbian empire. According to Milenko Vukićević, the author of widely popular textbooks on Serbian history[40] — one of those rare historians praised by Stanojević — 'Serbian medieval rulers were determined to create a mighty and powerful state, which would replace the

[37] Vladimir Jovanović, 'Društvena i međunarodna borba za opstanak', *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, 60, 1885, pp. 165–256 (p. 251).

[38] Dragutin J. Ilijć, 'Srpska demokratija u srednjem veku', *Letopis Matice srpske*, 163, 1890, 3, pp. 1–28 (p. 9).

[39] Stojan Novaković, 'Srpske oblasti u X i XII veku (pre vladavine Nemanjine). Istorijsko-geografska studija', *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, 48, 1880, pp. 148–49.

[40] See Charles Jelavich, 'Serbian Textbooks: Towards Greater Serbia or Yugoslavia?', *Slavic Review*, 42, 1983, 4, pp. 601–19.

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infirm Byzantine Empire and conduct the gathering of the other nations of the Balkans'.[41] Furthermore, he concluded, 'Emperor Dušan constantly had in his mind a great, powerful and well-ordered Serbian state […] which would be a haven of peace for Greeks and Albanians'.[42] In his later works, Vukićević emphatically declared that Dušan 'had always granted primacy to Serbs, although trying to provide a free life and prosperity to all other nations'.[43]

The same interpretive stream was widely shared not only by academic historians, but also a wide spectrum of intellectuals and public workers who encouraged the perception of the medieval Serbian empire not as an 'exclusively Serbian national state', as Sreten J. Ristić explained in his popular *Razvitak vladalačke vlasti u srpskom narodu* (Development of Ruling Authority in the Serbian Nation, 1902), but a state that was 'like Byzantium in the past […] or the Habsburg Monarchy or Russia of today'.[44] Similar accounts were not exclusively reserved to overtly nationalistic authors, but were also explicit in the writings of declared pro-Yugoslavs, such as Niko Županič or Jovan Cvijić. While in 1903 Županič firmly believed that 'There was no other nation than Serbia being predestined to bring a new life to an old, enervated culture [of Byzantizum]',[45] Cvijić authoritatively admonished in 1907 that 'The world should know and be sure that Serbia can *operate* a much larger territorial unit than it does at the moment'.[46] Cvijić would reiterate his assertion about Serbia being restricted by its current borders a few years later.[47]

In the post-First World War period, this interpretational paradigm received widespread public support which was further developed equally by para-scholarly literature and the writings of distinguished historians. Conclusions or premises, drawn even in 1929, in a heyday of integral Yugoslavism, that it was 'providence [that] has granted Serbs a leading role in Yugoslavia'[48] were duly historicized by the accounts of absolute Serbian supremacy in the past. 'With their martial virtues and consequent

[41] Milenko Vukićević, *Istorija srpskog naroda. Od dolaska Srba na Balkansko poluostrvo do polovine XV stoleća*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 1904, 1, p. 163.
[42] M. Vukićević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 1, p. 178.
[43] Milenko M. Vukićević, *Istorija srpskoga naroda u slici i reči*, Belgrade, 1912, pp. 204–05.
[44] Sreten J. Ristić, *Razvitak vladalačke vlasti u srpskom narodu*, Belgrade, 1902, p. 48.
[45] Niko Županič, 'Maćedonija i turski problem', *Delo*, 8, 1903, 2–3, pp. 161–206 (p. 170).
[46] Jovan Cvijić, 'O nacionalnom radu', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 18, 1907, 5, pp. 340–62 (p. 358), emphasis added.
[47] Jovan Cvijić, 'Balkanski rat i Srbija', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 29, 1912, 9, pp. 651–64 (p. 660).
[48] Nikola Stojanović, 'O zadatcima Bosne', *Letopis Matice srpske*, 321, 1929, 2, pp. 271–72.

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state-crafting aptitudes', wrote Nikola Radojčić in 1940, 'Serbs have far surpassed their Slav kinsmen'.[49] Indeed, a need for historical justification of Serbian primacy did not cease to exist even after the Cvetković-Maček Agreement had been signed in 1939, in the context of a bi-polar political reorganization of Yugoslavia. In 1940, for instance, the historian and university professor Dragoslav Stranjaković contextualized Garašanin's *Načeranije* as a programme for South Slav unification, with Serbia having the power to become an 'attractive core' for Yugoslavs.[50]

One can therefore devise a hypothesis that the idea of a modern state, in which Serbia would represent a core territory with Serbs as a dominant nation, entailed inventing the nation's historical antecedents. This, of course, included the elaboration of the dynamics of historical development. Serbian historians constructed their nation's medieval history as a history of the 'national' kingdom, which was believed to have been established with the first Nemanjićs, reaching its historical apex with King Milutin's reign (1282–1321).[51] As the state was succeeded by Emperor Dušan's short-lived empire, it transcended Serbian ethnic boundaries but still kept its original 'national' character. As already suggested, the historiographical construction of Stephen Dušan's 'multinational' empire could easily have suited political prospects of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Serbia as its modern equivalent and successor. For example, Vasa Čubrilović's praise of Stanojević's *Istorija srpskog naroda* (History of the Serbian Nation, 1908) as a key mobilization narrative in the context of the 'great events of 1912–1918',[52] undoubtedly referred to the wider influence of national historiography, saturated with the rhetoric of the 'empire's renewal'. This particular interpretation was, of course, fully developed as early as the 1880s. A few examples will suffice. In 1880 Stojan Novaković believed that the powerful Serbian medieval state 'became a foundation of a more extensive national life […] representing a covenant for us, its late descendants'.[53] Three decades later, on the brink of the Balkan Wars, he was still convinced that Serbia would have to keep its 'imperative task of serving as a core to numerous Yugoslav groups'.[54] In the second edition

[49] Nikola Radojčić, 'Ratničke vrline Srba u srednjem veku', *Letopis Matice srpske*, 353, 1940, 5–6, p. 325.

[50] Dragoslav Stranjaković, 'Srbija, privlačno središte Jugoslovena', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 61, 1940, 7, pp. 508–24.

[51] See 'Prošlost Stare Srbije', pp. 754–80.

[52] Vasa Čubrilović, 'Stanoje Stanojević', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 51, 1937, 8, p. 597.

[53] Stojan Novaković, 'Srpske oblasti u X i XII veku', p. 150.

[54] Cited after Radovan Samardžić, 'Stojan Novaković u srpskoj istoriografiji', in R. Samardžić (ed.), *Stojan Novaković: Iz srpske istorije*, Novi Sad and Belgrade, 1966, pp. 7–57

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of his *Istorija srpskog naroda*, published in 1910, as well as in his later *Od Velbužda do Kosova* (From Velbazhd to Kosovo, 1931), Stanoje Stanojević declared that Dušan's empire was doomed to failure as it was 'composed of very different national, religious and cultural elements',[55] implicitly suggesting that a remedy might have been provided only by their cultural levelling — a practice that reflected the preoccupations of Serbian elites in Yugoslavia. Interwar popular historiography was, nevertheless, more explicit. 'A great idea of Dušan's,' wrote Dr Vladimir Nikolić in 1927, 'was to transform the Balkans […] and to create a new order with Serbia as a leader.'[56] Furthermore, the same historian explained that 'To transfer his [Dušan's] ideas in the present, if they still can germinate, is the task of our society', emphatically concluding that 'Wholesome ideas never die, even if their creators have been dead for centuries'.[57]

These historical concepts were constantly actualized and negotiated among Serbian intellectuals who pursued expansionist designs either through the model of a Serbian nation-state or supra-national political integration, a process which eventually ended in the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918. However, the historical justification of Serbian national supremacy, spurred by historiographical narratives on Serbian-Byzantine relationships, did not cease to be relevant in the new Yugoslav multiethnic context, which was sharply marked by competing nation-building ideologies.

Between transfer and renewal

Historical interpretations of the relationship between Serbia and Byzantium had a number of ideological functions that roughly fit into two major ideological perspectives, those of nationalism and imperial rule. The simultaneity of these perspectives testifies to the overlapping of complementary, and not necessarily competing, political discourses in Serbia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The example of Serbian historiography rather problematizes the traditional antithesis between imperialism and nationalism, showing that a conjoined ideological agenda of the two may not be incongruent. Traditional antitheses between 'nation' and 'empire', rooted in post-1918 theory and pointed out by Ernest Gellner and many other modern scholars on nationalism, are not

(p. 53).

[55] Stanoje Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, Belgrade, 1910, p. 142. See also, St. Stanojević, *Od Velbužda do Kosova*, Belgrade, 1931, pp. 2–9.

[56] Dr Vladimir Nikolić, *Istorija cara Stevana Dušana*, Belgrade, 1927, p. 145.

[57] Dr V. Nikolić, *Istorija cara Stevana Dušana*, p. xix.

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always suitable.[58] It seems the historically entangled opposition between the empire and nation-state has more to do with abstract ideals and interpretive models than with political or/and cultural realities.[59] Indeed, imperialism and nationalism are not necessarily set against each other but are interwoven, and 'appear as twin expressions of the same phenomenon of power'.[60] Modern empires of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were relational in character, sharply marked by the hegemony of 'core-nations'. This means that modern imperial ideas were mostly characterized by the political and cultural supremacy of one national group which ruled over geographically, culturally and ethnically diverse entities and not necessarily vast territories.[61] Furthermore, it seems that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were neither sharp oppositions between nation-states and empires, nor were any fundamental differences apparent between empires and nation-states as regards the models of legitimizing political power, historiography included.[62] While the key attributes of modern empires seem to be the 'management of space and multi-ethnicity' along with '"hard power" in the international context',[63] the political rationale of modern empires was usually highly compatible 'with the idea of the sovereign nation-state that projects […] power beyond its borders'.[64] All these features are entirely applicable to the context of developing nationalisms justified by national historiographies in the early-twentieth-century Balkans.

[58] Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayali & Eric van Young, 'Introduction', in J. W. Esherick, H. Kayali & E. van Young (eds), *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, Oxford, 2006, pp. 1–31; Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred*, London, 2006; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, 1983.

[59] See Ilya Gerasimov et al., 'New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire', in Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kubsner & Alexander Semyonov (eds), *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Racionalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, Leiden, 2009, pp. 3–32; Dominic Lieven, 'Dilemmas of Empire 1850–1918: Power, Territory, Identity', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34, (1999), 2, pp. 163–200.

[60] Krishan Kumar, 'Empire and English Nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism*, 12, 2006, 1, p. 2. See also, Chris A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford, 2004, p. 230.

[61] See Richard Koebner, *Empire*, Cambridge, 1961; Erik J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*, London, 1987. See also, Alexander J. Motyl, 'Why Empires Reemerge: Imperial Collapse and Imperial Revival in Comparative Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, 21, 1999, 2, pp. 127–45; Michael Dole, *Empires*, Ithaca, NY, 1986.

[62] Maciej Janowski, 'Justifying Political Power in 19th Century Europe: The Habsburg Monarchy and Beyond', in Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (eds), *Imperial Rule*, Budapest and New York, 2004, p. 78. See Heather Jones, 'The German Empire', in Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela (eds), *Empires at War 1911–1923*, Oxford, 2014, p. 57.

[63] Lieven, 'Dilemmas of Empire 1850–1918', p. 133.

[64] Gerasimov et al., 'New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire', p. 7.

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Mainstream historical narratives of the Balkan nations at the time were based on similar perspectives and comparable adoption of the Byzantine legacy. For example, Nicolae Iorga (1871–1949), a key Romanian historian of the first half of the twentieth century, established a Romanian national canon in historiography by placing the Romanian nation and its history in the midst of a historical-geographical entity which he conveniently called *Byzance après Byzance*.[65] In spite of creating a supra-national interpretational pattern, which differed from the predominant nationalistic historiography of his contemporaries, Iorga simultaneously supported the idea of Byzantium as common Balkan heritage and asserted a leading role of Romanians as Byzantium's prime heirs and a paramount nation of the Balkans.[66] Following the interpretational model of Byzantine succession which, apart from Serbia, was also developed in Greek historiography, Iorga wrote that Romanian post-medieval history, along with that of the Ottoman Empire, clearly demonstrated the continuity of Byzantium, providing a point of departure for what he named 'Greek Byzantium' and 'Slavic Byzantium',[67] while at the same time denouncing both Serbs and Bulgarians as mere imitators (and not inheritors) of Byzantium.[68] At the same time, Greek historians and followers of Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, the founder of modern Greek history, such as Dimitrios Vikelas (1835–1908) and Spyridon Lambros (1851–1919), formulated a structurally similar concept of continuity with the Byzantine Empire, conceived through the ideological perspective of *Megale Idea* (The Great Idea), by which Byzantium was Hellenized and consequently seen as a sublime expression and continuation of the Hellenic national genius.[69] These competing historical discourses, which reflected the political

[65] See Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance. Continuation de l'Histoire de la vie Byzantine*, Bucharest, 1935 (Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, trans. Laura Treptow, Iaşi, 2000).

[66] Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness,* Budapest, 1997, pp. 63–67, 177–180; Virgil Cândea, 'Introduction', in '*Byzantium after Byzantium*, pp. 7–23.

[67] Nicolae Iorga, *Formes byzantines et réalités balcaniques*, Bucharest-Paris, 1922; Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria statelor balcanice în epoca modernă*, Vălenii-de-Munte, 1913, p. 11.

[68] Nicolae Iorga, *Choses d'Orient et de Roumanie*, Bucharest, 1924, p. 40.

[69] See Paschalis Kitromilides, 'On the Intellectual Content of Greek Nationalism: Paparrigopoulos, Byzantium and the Great Idea', in David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (eds), *Byzantium and Modern Greek Identity*, London, 1998, pp. 25–33; Paschalis Kitromilides, '"Imagined Communities" and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans', *European History Quarterly*, 19, 1989, 2, pp. 149–92; Gregory Jusdanis, *The Necessary Nation*, Princeton, NJ, 2001, p. 108; Antonis Liakos, 'Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space', in Katerina Zacharia (ed.), *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, Aldershot, 2008, pp. 201–36.

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landscape of the Balkans, were closely linked with the contemporaneous Serbian historiography of the period, which centred on Serbia as the cultural and political heir to Byzantium.

Although Serbian national historiography remained decisively important in justifying political power and territorial aspirations, it was not only scholarship that enabled the ideas of Serbian imperial heritage and Byzantine succession to become instrumental and active in shaping modern political objectives. The deep impact of the intellectual ferment from which Garašanin's *Načertanije* arose, which utilized the same arguments about Serbia's succession to Byzantium that permeated national historiography, helped to outline a framework of national mission in following decades.[70] A crucial argument of Garašanin's treatise and its early-twentieth-century ramifications was based on the powerful hold of historical state rights and a need for the 'resurrection of medieval Serbian-Slavic empire' seen as arising from the 'fallen Byzantium'.[71]

As already explained, the same premise was constantly examined in Serbian nation-building historiography. This involved the comparison and identification of medieval Nemanjićs with modern Serbian royal dynasties, both the Obrenovićs and Karadjordjevićs,[72] which was a typical nationalistic attempt to link 'present dynasties and peoples with illustrious ancient pedigrees'.[73] Serbian historians elaborated ideas of continuity and historical rights, reinforcing the fusion of nationalism and imperialism that otherwise permeated public discourse.[74]

The appropriation of Byzantium and the consequent interpretation of a national past were developing under the pressure of competing national ideologies of the Balkan nations,[75] as well as a paternalizing Western discourse which was a perennial issue associated with the Eastern Question.[76] At the same time, the political landscape of the Balkans of the

[70] Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert,* Munich, 2010, pp. 48–55.

[71] Cited after Radoš Ljušić, *Knjiga o načertaniju: nacionalni i državni program Kneževine Srbije (1844)*, Kragujevac, 2003, p. 190.

[72] Djura Vrbavac, *Nemanjići i Obrenovići ili upoređenje dva svetla perioda u našoj prošlosti*, Kragujevac, 1899; Sreten J. Ristić, *Razvitak vladalačke vlasti u srpskom narodu*, Belgrade, 1902, pp. 89–90; Novaković, 'O ulozi vladaoca', pp. 306–07. See also Nenad Makuljević, *Crkvena umetnost u Kraljevini Srbiji 1882–1914*, Belgrade, 2007, pp. 14–28.

[73] Anthony D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 215.

[74] See Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalization and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflicts in the Balkans*, Westport, CT, 2001, pp. 101–30.

[75] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 203–04.

[76] See Ristić, *Razvitak vladalačke vlasti*, pp. 88–105; Aleksandar Pogodin, 'Da li je rešeno Istočno pitanje?', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 25, 1928, 4, pp. 289–93.

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late nineteenth and early twentieth century was marked by the ideology of the 'liberation and unification' of South Slavs, which went hand in hand with the idea of Serbian national supremacy. Serbian national historiography was also involved in the 'historical justification' of political culture in Serbia, as well as Yugoslavia, distinguished by authoritarian rule and monarchism, rigid centralism of the state administration, as well as the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church on public affairs. Although these political attitudes were present in the work of earlier generations of Serbian historians, primarily Panta Srećković, Milan Ubavkić and Ljubomir Kovačević,[77] they never cease to capture historians' imagination. This was most notable in the interwar period when the need for justifying growing authoritarianism was constantly on the rise — not only during King Alexander Karadjordjević's reign (1921–34) but throughout the 1930s as well.[78]

The historiographical construction of medieval Serbs as heirs to the Byzantine Empire and concurrent ideas about the restitution of the medieval 'Serbo-Byzantine' state were generically linked to the classical doctrines of *translatio imperii* and *renovatio imperii*,[79] the doctrines which were otherwise employed in various contemporary national narratives and the romantic tradition of history writing.[80] Serbian national historiography was suffused with echoes of the concept of *renovatio* which was, as in many other cases in modern history, adapted to the aims of genuine nationalism in order to justify political and cultural dominance or to secure power. Many Serbian historians of the period advanced a thesis about medieval 'nation-states' reaching their apogees and endeavouring to surpass 'ethnic' limits and conquer vast territories, far beyond ethnographic boundaries. This schema was often utilized to explain the genesis of the 'multinational' medieval Serbian empire[81] which was nevertheless 'based on the national idea'.[82] The ideological relevance of these historiographical accounts went into public discourse simultaneously with the political maturity of Serbian elites preoccupied with the enlargement of the state — either through a

[77] This is best represented in Pantelija Srećković, *Iz istorije srpske: Češlav (933–962)*, Belgrade, pp. 32, 45–46, 56; Milan S. Ubavkić, *Istorija Srba*, Belgrade, 1891, pp. 8–9, 27, 36–38, 136–37; Lj. Kovačević and Lj. Jovanović, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, pp. 155–56.

[78] See particularly, Radonić, *Prošlost Stare Srbije*, pp. 6–7; Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, pp. 162–63; Radojčić, *Razvitak srpske* države, pp. 112–13.

[79] See, for instance, Randall Lesafer, *European Legal History: A Cultural and Political Perspective*, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 145–48.

[80] See Janowski, 'Justifying Political Power', pp. 78–79.

[81] Radojčić, *Razvitak srpske države*, p. 116.

[82] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, p. 560.

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programme of Serbian 'national liberation' or, alternatively, South Slavic unity (which was sometimes constructed and seen as a euphemism for Serbian territorial enlargements).[83] In any case, the ideas of re-creating the medieval Serbian state were widely shared and discussed by historians in reference to the restitution of Stefan Dušan's Empire, either in the perspective of a genuinely national or enlarged, multinational state.[84] This ambivalent but instrumental attitude concerned most nation-building historians. Panta Srećković, for instance, while writing on the lessons of the medieval past, advocated a 'restoration of our empire' and 'renewal of [Stefan] Dušan's Empire'.[85] His and other contemporary historians' accounts, which mirrored concurrent preoccupations with the nation's glory in its medieval past, were followed by writers such as Stanoje Stanojević who spoke about the restoration of the medieval Serbian state as a remedy for the nation's prospective unity.[86] Eventually, a belief in the return of a national golden age became a 'symbol of the communal desires and ideals of the Serbian people' and the 'covenant of all Serbs'.[87]

The discourse of the empire's restoration went hand in hand with a complementary concept of *translatio imperii*, which was used to explain and justify medieval Serbia as a successor to the Eastern Roman Empire seen from the perspective of its decline. It has already been explained that unlike the 'Serbian national' kingdom of the early Nemanjićs, which was thought to be characterized by an 'ethnical kernel cherished and protected in a hard shell of the national state',[88] Stefan Dušan's 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire', along with King Milutin's kingdom as its immediate ideological predecessor, were believed to be predestined to replace declining Byzantium. Following the negativist model of Byzantium's perception, all Serbian historians of the period depicted the Eastern Roman Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth century as a mere shadow of its former glory, a

[83] Dennison Rusinow, 'The Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia', in Dejan Djokić (ed.), *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992*, London, 2003, pp. 20–21; Kosta St. Pavlowitch, 'The First World War and the Unification of Yugoslavia', in *Yugoslavism*, p. 28; Ivo Banac, *National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca, NY, 1988, pp. 98–102.

[84] See H. Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Serbiens im 19.–20. Jahrhundert*, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 2007, p. 32; George W. White, *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe*, Lanham, MD and Oxford, 2000, pp. 187–89,

[85] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, p. 817.

[86] Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, pp. 206–09, 296–346.

[87] Stanoje Stanojević, *Car Dušan*, Belgrade, 1922, pp. 3, 5. See also, Ubavkić, *Istorija Srba*, p. 100.

[88] Sima M. Ćirković, 'Moravska Srbija u istoriji srpskog naroda', in Vojislav Djurić (ed.), *Moravska škola i njeno doba*, Belgrade, 1968, p. 104.

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notoriously moribund organism which had to be 'supplanted' by the most vital and strongest state of the Balkans, which was that of the Nemanjićs. Serbian historiography depicted Emperor Dušan's state as Byzantium's only legitimate heir in spite of the fact that the same heritage had been frequently associated with several other states of the same era, such as the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1422) or the Empire of Trebizond (1204–1461). Some historians, especially Konstantin Jireček and Vladimir Ćorović, firmly believed that the creation of Stefan Dušan's Empire was inspired by the Bulgarian case,[89] which was an idea also shared by Stojan Novaković.[90] Regardless of these variants of interpretation, historians associated what they saw as basic features of Byzantine politics — such as 'Roman imperialism' and 'autocracy' — with the political culture of medieval Serbia. Its depiction as a 'classic realm of autocracy in Europe' acquired strong political connotations, both positive and negative. Stojan Novaković in particular developed these theses while describing the idea of continuity of the 'autocrats of Rome and Constantinople', which was ostensibly adopted by the Nemanjićs and believed to have been consciously re-established by rulers of modern Serbia.[91] Emperor Stefan Dušan was accordingly called the 'new Constantine'[92] and the royal lineage of medieval Nemanjićs was thought to have descended from the first Christian emperor — a nebulous trope, taken from medieval sources, which was reiterated in the period's historiography and beyond.[93]

All these features explain why relationships between Byzantium and medieval Serbia were interpreted through a double prism of political conflict and cultural succession, with the Serbian royal dynasty — interpreted as 'national' by historians — seen as the only capable inheritor of the Byzantine throne. This was a common characteristic of the whole historiographical tradition, including both the first 'romantics' and subsequent 'critics'. The image of Byzantium as a 'corrupted and thoughtless society',[94] a country of 'sly proprietors'[95] characterized by 'poverty and moral decay'[96] as well as 'chaos and anarchy',[97] was narrated

[89] Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, 2, p. 222; *Istorija Jugoslavije*, p. 153. See also, Ljubomir Maksimović, *Vizantijski svet i Srbi*, Belgrade, 2008, p. 205.
[90] Novaković, 'Nekolika teža pitanja', p. 69.
[91] Novaković, 'O ulozi vladaoca u državnom organizmu', pp. 306–07.
[92] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, p. 716.
[93] Ibid., pp. 484–85; Stanojević, *Car Dušan*, pp. 8–23. See also, *Vizantijski svet i Srbi*, p. 139.
[94] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, pp. 36 ff.
[95] Ibid., p. 189.
[96] Ibid., p. 358. See also: Stanojević, *Vizantija i Srbi*, 2, pp. 119–20.
[97] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, p. 505.

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repeatedly — from Srećković in the 1870s and 1880s to Stanojević in the 1930s — and became the emblem of the national historiographical canon of the interwar period. Stanojević, for instance, depicted the Eastern Roman Empire as an enfeebled organism which had continuously 'languished and vegetated' since the time of Justinian, in sharp contrast to a Slavic potency and vigour. As Milan Ubavkić put in 1891, succinctly expressing the same interpretive tradition whilst using the metaphor of David and Goliath, 'once vast, glorious, and haughty Byzantium was to submit to a small, but courageous Serbian fist'.[98]

An integral part of the *translatio* explanatory model, which was closely linked to the negativist perception of Byzantium, was the idea of the 'Greek yoke'. Being reiterated throughout the entire historiographical tradition, it originated in Srećković's accounts on Byzantium's continuous ambitions to conquer and dominate medieval Serbs (either politically, culturally or both), which was a process that paradoxically coincided with the growing deterioration of the Eastern Roman Empire from the twelfth to the fourteenth century.[99] The same historian acknowledged the various kinds of negative influences deriving from Byzantine political and cultural traditions on medieval Serbia, affecting primarily its 'Slavic core' and what was commonly believed to represent a primordial form of Serbian self-government embodied in the state of the first Nemanjics.[100] The next generation of historians, including Srećković's staunchest critics such as Dimitrije Ruvarac and Stojan Novaković, nonetheless kept the same strain of interpretation while writing on the relationship between Serbia and Byzantium. Novaković in particular developed a thesis about the detrimental influence of Byzantium on medieval Serbia in terms of its pursuit of imperialist attitudes and its unnatural striving for expansion.[101] On the other hand, the opposition between vigorous Serbs and decadent Byzantines, which was initially constructed by historians of Srećković's generation, continued to have a prominent place in historiography. Amongst many others, Stanoje Stanojević was a principal proponent of an ancient cultural and moral divide between Serbs and Greeks.[102] This idea supported his and his follower's historical determinism and theories of the inevitability of the Serbian *translatio*.[103] The vivid contrast of prosperous

[98] Ubavkić, *Istorija Srba*, p. 172.
[99] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, pp. 36–42.
[100] Ibid., pp. 811–16.
[101] Novaković, 'Nekolika teža pitanja', pp. 87–91.
[102] Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, pp. 84–85, 91–94.
[103] Ibid., pp. 139, 155.

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Serbs versus 'decaying and atrophied'[104] Byzantines served as a subtle justification of medieval Serbia's supposed transition from a small tribal state to become the sole successor to the Eastern Roman Empire.

In the political context of the late nineteenth and especially during the first decades of the twentieth century, the ideological backdrop of these epistemological-ideological concepts was becoming more and more appealing and applicable. Historians regarded the 'Serbian element' as a 'mainstay of [multinational] Stefan Dušan's Empire',[105] with Serbs representing an imperial core-nation and 'principal community',[106] a nation predestined to become a leader in the modern era. Like its medieval predecessor, a new multinational political entity, be it 'Greater Serbia' or a unified South Slavic state, would be dominated by Serbs as the major ethnic group of the Balkans. This attitude, which pretty well sums up the viewpoints of many Serbian scholars, and not only historians, was explicit from the formative works of the nation-building historiography and elaborated by Jovan Radonić[107] and Milan Ubavkić,[108] as well as Kovačević and Jovanović.[109] The fact that Serbian linguists and ethnologists simultaneously fortified the same argument using anthropological evidence, as Jovan Cvijić did in his influential work *O nacionalnom radu* (On National Action, 1907) — a work that Vladimir Ćorović would later praise, calling it 'a national gospel of a kind'[110] — further induced a tension between the 'glorious' past, puny present and promising future of the nation.[111] The idea of Serbs as great masters of statecraft, and of Serbs as a cornerstone of the medieval empire which would retain its status in a future multinational state, gained momentum with the rise of Yugoslavism in the 1910s and 1920s. This idea was further propelled by interwar Serbian historians, most notably Vladimir Ćorović.[112] However, it was Stanoje Stanojević's seminal book, *Istorija srpskog naroda* (History of the Serbian Nation, 1908) that firmly established Serbs as historical state-builders and the imperial core-nation. He elaborated an inherent Serbian propensity for state-building, which had supposedly marked the entire history of Serbia since the early Middle Ages and had had magnetic

[104] Stanojević, *Od Velbužda do Kosova*, p. 1.
[105] Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, p. 13.
[106] Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*', p. 153.
[107] Radonić, *Prošlost Stare Srbije*, pp. 14–15.
[108] See Ubavkić, *Istorija Srba*.
[109] See Kovačević and Jovanović, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. 2.
[110] V. Ćorović, 'Nacionalni značaj Jovana Cvijića', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 50, 1937, 3, pp. 182–89 (p. 186).
[111] Cvijić, 'O nacionalnom radu', pp. 340–62, esp. 342, 352, 358.
[112] Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, pp. 127–31.

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effects on all Balkan ethnic groups, both Slavic and non-Slavic. Stanojević's thesis profoundly affected interwar historians.[113] In his later works on the subject, he further developed these theses which strongly resonated not only among professional historians but had a tremendous impact on the wider historical imagination.[114]

From the mid 1930s, historical arguments about Serbian national and racial supremacy in the medieval Balkans were reinterpreted through more systematic explorations of how medieval Serbs had reached 'ethnic and state advancement' and eventually managed to craft an empire. They had managed to do this through what Stanojević called the 'ethnic and state offensive of the Serbian nation',[115] which Vladimir Dvorniković and others further developed in the late 1930s.[116] Possessing 'state-crafting genes' inherited from their Slavic ancestors, medieval Serbs advanced successfully through the Balkans, enhancing and refining the adopted Byzantine heritage, disseminating a uniquely superb national culture, levelling ethnic differences and uniting the entire population of the Balkans. This model of interpretation, which obviously reflected the contemporaneous theories of *Gleichschaltung*,[117] as well as the concurrent trend of the cultural unification of the Serbian nation through various cultural and political means, was a topically resonant theme in the context of increasing conflicts between the country's major national groups, most notably Serbs and Croats. The interwar period was distinguished by the further development of these ideas, with a number of works being produced to justify the uneven distribution of political power in the country, sharply marked by the dominance of Serbs — in politics, military service and culture.[118] Furthermore, the interpretations of Stefan Dušan's

[113] Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, pp. 40–51; Božidar Kovačević, 'Srpski udeo u bugarskoj kulturi', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 59, 1940, 4, pp. 264–70; 5, pp. 366–76; Drag.[oslav] Stranjaković, 'Srbija, privlačno sedište Jugoslovena', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 61, 1940, 7, pp. 508–24.

[114] See, for instance, Stanoje Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda za srednje i stručne škole*, Belgrade, 1919, pp. 35–83.

[115] Stanojević, *Od Velbužda do Kosova*, pp. 1–2; St.[anoje] Stanojević, 'Postanak srpskog naroda', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 41, 1934, 2, pp. 110–17.

[116] Vladimir Dvorniković, *Karakterologija Jugoslovena*, Belgrade, 1939, pp. 851–54.

[117] The term *Gleichschaltung* was used in the German context of the 1930s to express the meaning of a compact and unitary nation based on cultural, social and political harmony. See Catherine A. Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 50–51; Roderick Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany: Origins, Interpretations, Legacies*, London, 2014, pp. 106–06.

[118] See, for instance, Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, pp. 127–31, 147–54; Kovačević, 'Srpski udeo u bugarskoj kulturi', pp. 264–70; Stranjaković, 'Srbija, privlačno sedište', pp. 508–24.

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appellation as the 'Serbo-Byzantine Emperor'[119] and, more formally, the 'Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks',[120] historicized the idea of a multiethnic state ruled by a Serbian monarch and dominated by Serbs, which would suit the modern nation- and state-building context. The ideological flexibility of historical narratives was the main reason for the endurance of this particular interpretational paradigm.

A widespread tradition of likening King Alexander I Karadjordjević to Emperor Dušan might further have reinforced the parallelism of medieval Serbian empire and the South Slav modern kingdom. Having been initially developed on the eve of the Balkan Wars, when the then Prince Alexander started his military career, this tradition was particularly amplified after the king's assassination in 1934, not only by patriotic panegyrists,[121] but also academic historians.[122] Drawing explicit parallels between Dušan's and Alexander's political projects was not an uncommon practice, with the famous French Byzantologist Gabriel Millet's inaugural speech at the Second Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Belgrade in 1927 being amongst its most conspicuous examples. He identified Emperor Stefan Dušan's state with that of 'our time, in which a mighty state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was created under the sceptre of our [Serbian] king'.[123] This was particularly resonant in the atmosphere of heightened ideological consciousness among many Serbian intellectuals and the political elite of the time.

A crucial aspect of the entire historiographical tradition was the question of national distinctiveness and cultural exceptionality. It is true that medieval Serbian culture was seen by historians as being heavily influenced by Byzantium, but only partly Byzantinized. At the heart of the economy of the Serbian *translatio imperii* were cultural difference and cultural parentage, notions explained through apparent contrasts between two historical cultures, namely, the Serbian and Greek. This, for instance, led not only Vladimir Ćorović to say that the forceful 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire' was predestined to replace the 'exhausted and decaying' Byzantium, but also many other historians to base their work on the

[119] Stanojević, *Car Dušan*, p. 16.

[120] See Maksimović, *Vizantijski svet i Srbi*, pp. 133–49, 191–206.

[121] Al.[eksandar] Jovanović, *Postanak Egzarhije i Turska, Rusija i Srbija: istorijsko-politička rasprava*, Skopje, 1936, p. 168.

[122] Vladimir Ćorović, 'Kralj Aleksandar', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 43, 1934, 4, pp. i–viii (p. i).

[123] 'Juče je u kraljevom prisustvu otvoren kongres vizantologa u Beogradu', *Vreme* (Belgrade), 12 April 1927. See also, 'Svečano otvaranje vizantološkog kongresa', *Politika* (Belgrade), 12 April 1927.

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economy of cultural contrasts.[124] The images of the Byzantine Empire as an enervated 'Serbian mother' were complemented by an image of Serbia as a vigorous 'daughter of Byzantium'.[125] These ideas were reinforced by interpretations of culture, especially medieval Serbian frescoes and monastic architecture, which were seen as 'branches' of a Byzantine 'stem', or a Byzantine seed 'grown on the domestic soil'.[126] To overcome the detrimental influence of Byzantium's political decadence and continue its sophisticated but ossified culture that had already been in decline[127] — all these aims represented a very essence of the discourse. The 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire' of the Nemanjićs was consequently seen as a shoot grown from a dual Slavic-Byzantine heritage, a hybrid of Byzantine and Slavic cultures. As the historian Stanoje Stanojević put it in his seminal work in 1903, 'A great part of Serbian [medieval] culture — state affairs, administrative, military and church organization, as well as education and material culture — were taken from Byzantium and *grafted onto* [Serbian] national distinctiveness'.[128] Employing parental and botanical metaphors to support the theses of cultural distinctiveness was a common practice among historians who wrote extensively of a cultural and moral supremacy of Serbia over Byzantium. This tradition, which can also be followed in art history, lasted more than fifty years, starting with Srećković and ending with Ćorović, who concluded in an exhilarating mood that Serbia's 'self-propelled state became an improved [form of] empire, whilst the old Byzantium, by reason of its feebleness, had fallen into ruins like a worm-eaten timber'.[129]

Serbian historians by and large remained amenable to the idea that the 'Byzantine element' had been perfected and improved by the Serbian 'popular spirit' and 'national traditions',[130] for which they provided a variety of evidence, such as a genuine Serb peasant system of self-government,

[124] Ćorović, *Istorija* Jugoslavije, p. 152.

[125] Mihailo Valtrović, 'Studenica', *Srpske ilustrovane novine za zabavu, pouku, umetnost i književnost*, 1, 1881, 8, p. 122; Mihailo Valtrović, 'Govor kojim je izaslanik Srpskog učenog društva za snimanje umetničkih starina po Srbiji, Mihailo Valtrović otvorio drugi izlog snimaka arhitektonskih, skulptornih i živopisnih; 14. aprila 1874. god', in *Valtrović i Milutinović*, p. 106.

[126] Dragutin S. Milutinović, 'Kratka rasprava pri otvaranju petog izloga snimaka arhitektonskih, živopisnih i skulpturnih, 14. maja 1878. godine', *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, 74, 1879, 264, pp. 182–83; Mihailo Valtrović, *O προδρομοσ: Mittheilungen über neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiete serbischer Kirchenbaukunst: mit einer Tafel*, Vienna, 1878, p. 160; Radojčić, *Razvitak srpske države*, p. 140.

[127] Novaković, 'Srednjovekovna Srbija i rimsko pravo', p. 221.

[128] Stanojević, *Vizantija i Srbi*, 2, p. iv (emphasis added).

[129] Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, p. 152.

[130] Radojčić, *Razvitak srpske države*, p. 119.

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popular democracy, communal assemblies and peasant communes, as well as Byzantine-inspired, improved and authentically rendered architecture and visual arts. This may indicate the ideological instrumentality of Serbian national historiography and the fact that both the *renovatio* and *translatio* concepts were utilized according to modern political standards and ideological needs. Indeed, the question of Serbian inclinations to imperial rule being historicized and justified by the purported superiority of medieval Serbs over the rest of the Balkan nations was central to many contemporaneous historical narratives. This is the reason why the adopted and 'perfected' Byzantine cultural heritage became so significantly purposeful in the context of modern Serbian nation- and state-building. Yet there was another aspect of Serbian imperial imagination which became crucial for the ideological employment of Serbian-Byzantine relationships in the context of competing nation-building agendas of the time. This was the question of an autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church.

Nationalized church, national empire

During the 'long nineteenth century' the strengthening of nationalism among the Christian nations of the Balkans was spurred by the process of gaining both political independence from the Ottoman Empire and autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. The parallelism of independent national states and churches played a key role in the political life of the Balkans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Greek Orthodox Church was the first to declare religious-national independence in 1833, followed by the Bulgarians in 1870, the Serbs in 1879 and, finally, the Romanians in 1885.[131] As John Meyendorf put it, 'since the political goal of all the nationalities consisted of seeking the creation of nation-states — which were seen as the ultimate fulfilment of cultural growth and maturity — the idea of "autocephaly" came to be thought of as the nation's ecclesiastical equivalent'.[132]

The question of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church was extremely important for the legitimization of national independence and encouragement of the constantly evolving and diversifying political

[131] See Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 'The Ecumenical Patriarchate', in Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*, New York, 2014, pp. 14–32; Paschalis M. Kitomilides, 'The Orthodox Church in Modern State Formation in South-Eastern Europe', in Alina Mungiu Pippidi and Wim van Meurs (eds), *Ottomans into Europeans: State and Institution Building in South Eastern Europe*, London, 2010, pp. 31–50; Roudometof, *Nationalism*, pp. 101–30.

[132] John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, Crestwood, NY, 2001, p. 271.

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agendas.[133] As a framework for imagining the renewal of the 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire', autocephaly was thought to represent a rebirth of the Serbian medieval 'ancestral' church. This was regarded as a crucial step in the reestablishment of the Peć Patriarchate, the church organization of medieval Serbia, which had been elevated to the status of a Patriarchate from the previously established archbishopric simultaneously with the declaration of the empire in 1346. The Patriarchate itself had a chequered history: first abolished by the Ottoman Turks in the 1460s, it was restored in 1557 to be suspended anew in 1766.[134] In the Serbian historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (which shared common views of many Balkan historians about the interdependence of medieval churches and states, as well as the association of religion and national identity)[135] the Serbian Orthodox Church was considered a custodian of genuine national traditions and deemed a stakeholder of the restitution of medieval empire.[136] Historical writing advanced the thesis that the Serbian national idea had persisted owing to the survival of the 'national' church after the country had been conquered by the Ottomans,[137] which was a very similar pattern of seeing the national past as in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.[138] The nationalization of Orthodoxy in Serbian historiography began with Panta Srećković in the 1880s,[139] and was further developed in the writings of the early twentieth-century historians.[140] Even the rigorously critical Novaković asserted in 1911 that 'Serbian identity and Orthodoxy are inseparable'.[141]

The intertwined question of ecclesiastical independence and nation-building was important particularly in the context of competing narratives of Serbian and Bulgarian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early

[133] See Bojan Aleksov, 'The Serbian Orthodox Church', in Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*, New York, 2014, pp. 65–100.

[134] See John Anthony McGuckin (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Oxford, 2011, pp. 560–65.

[135] See Frederick F. Anscombe, *State, Faith and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands*, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 151–52; Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, Oxford and New York, 2002, pp. 8–9.

[136] See Sima Ćirković, *The Serbs*, Oxford, 2004, p. xx; Rajko Veselinović, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve sa narodnom istorijom: (1766–1945)*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 2004, 2, pp. 241–42; Djoko Slijepčević, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve II: Od početka XIX veka do kraja Drugog svetskog rata*, Belgrade, 1991, pp. 296, 442–46.

[137] Jovan Hadži Vasiljević, *Bugarska egzarhija i njen uticaj na balkanske Slovene*, Belgrade, 1913.

[138] Lucian N. Leustean, 'Introduction', in *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism*, pp. 1–13.

[139] Srećković, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 2, pp. 669–70.

[140] Radonić, *Prošlost Stare Srbije*, pp. 6–12.

[141] Novaković, 'Nekolika teža pitanja', pp. 69–70.

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twentieth centuries, after the autonomous Bulgarian Exarchate was established in 1870.[142] The Exarchate gained jurisdiction over the lands claimed by the Serbian political and intellectual elite; it was particularly the question of Macedonia which provoked condemnation and disdain. The fact that the newly formed Bulgarian church organization (that was, to say, the Bulgarians) had occupied Serbian 'historical lands'[143] engendered noisy opposition from Serbian scholars, from historians to linguists, who strove to provide tangible evidence that the medieval Serbian state and its church were truly 'national'. Arguments over the disputed territories, which were dotted with numerous medieval churches considered to be 'Serbo-Byzantine' in both style and iconography, were followed by accounts of Bulgarians 'appropriating' and 'Bulgarianizing' architectural monuments and defacing medieval frescoes across the newly established Exarchate. This ultimately became a key argument in the debate that continued to be discussed even in the interwar years.[144] Seen in the nation-building context of contemporary South Eastern Europe sharply marked by ethnic grievances, the Balkan Wars and the consequent dissolution of both the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, the nationalized medieval heritage had many battles to fight.

Of course, the assumptions about the interdependency of modern national states and churches spilled out into the popular imagination and public discourse. The territories which had once been under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate were associated with the natural habitat of the nation. On the eve of the campaigns in the 1910s and World War One, historians often declared that the 'Peć Patriarchate had encompassed not

[142] See Daniela Kalkandjieva, 'The Bulgarian Orthodox Church', in *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism*, pp. 164–202; Daniela Kalkandjieva, 'The Bulgarian Orthodox Church at the Crossroads: Between Nationalism and Pluralism', in Andrii Krawchuk & Thomas Bremer (eds), *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, Basingstoke, 2014, pp. 47–68; Anastasia W. Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1770–1990*, Chicago, IL, 1997, pp. 77–107.

[143] Živan Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije*, 4 vols, Belgrade, 3, 1924, p. 318.

[144] Andra J. Stevanović, 'Jedno zanimljivo otkriće u izgledu', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 1, 1920, 5, pp. 371–76; Andra J. Stevanović, 'Nekoliko profanih fresko-slika otkrivenih u Markovom manastiru', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 5, 1922, 3, p. 217; Lazar Mirković and Žarko Tatić, *Markov manastir*, Belgrade, 1925, p. 1; Vlad.[imir] R. Petković, 'A. Protich, Un modèle des maîtres bulgares du XV et XVI siècle. Prague 1926', *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, 6, 1926, 1, pp. 150–53; Vlad.[imir] R. Petković, 'A. Protič, Jugozapadnata škola v blgarskata stenopis pred XIII i XIV v.', *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, 6, 1926, 1, pp. 153–56; Al[eksandar] Jovanović, *Postanak Egzarhije i Turska, Rusija i Srbija. Istorijsko-politička rasprava*, Skopje, 1936, pp. 25–26, 104–37; Milan Kašanin, 'La Revue bulgare', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 30, 1930, 8, p. 635; Djurdje Bošković, 'N. Mavrodinov', *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, 13, 1933, 1, pp. 216–28.

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only Serbia (including Macedonia) but also South Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Slavonia, Croatia and Southern Hungary', which were all considered Serbian lands.[145] The associations of Orthodoxy and 'Serbianess' were so deeply entrenched in historiography that they led an otherwise sensible modern historian to conclude, rather clumsily, that the Serbian Orthodox Church was the 'only Balkan church organization capable of stamping its own national movement with its own imprint'.[146] Despite the apparent paradox of the nationalization of the medieval and early modern patriarchate — which was initially forged in the context of the Habsburg Serbs' proto-nationalism in the eighteenth century — these associations had a particular impact and were frequently used to foster political goals. The primary one was first to conceptualize, and then to encircle, what was considered to represent 'Serbian lands', as well as to underline their imperial-national status and potentials in future political discussions and campaigns, especially in the context of the Balkan Wars and World War One. Merging two territorial units, that of Stefan Dušan's empire and the Patriarchate of Peć, neatly outlined Serbian territorial aspirations. Just as Serbian historians nationalized the Byzantine heritage, the same occurred with Orthodoxy, such that the 'legitimate and canonical regionalism sanctioned by the canons of the early church was transformed, in modern Orthodoxy, into divisive ecclesiastical nationalism'.[147]

It was only in 1919 when the Serbian Orthodox Church was finally united and gained full ecclesiastical independence, on the cusp of the Serbian national project[148] which — only seemingly paradoxically — paralleled the creation of Yugoslavia.[149] The seeming paradox of encouraging integral Yugoslavism simultaneously to strengthen Serbian nationalism can be unravelled if the latter is seen as a hidden rationale lying behind the Yugoslav project. This opens up a perspective in which the Kingdom of

[145] Petar Popović, 'Srpska Makedonija', *Bratstvo*, 15, 1903, p. 103; Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, pp. 206–09.

[146] Banac, *National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 68.

[147] Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy*, p. 228. On the perplexed issue of religion and nationalism in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church, see Pieter Troch, 'The Intertwining of Religion and Nationhood in Interwar Yugoslavia: The School Celebrations of St Sava's Day', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 91, 2013, 2, pp. 235–61.

[148] Vladimir Ćorović's exalted accounts on the Patriarchate's 'renovatio' is telling. See his 'Proglas Srpske patrijaršije', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 1, 1920, 4, pp. 300–03.

[149] See Rajko Veselinović, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva 1920–1970*, Belgrade, 1971, pp. 13–35; Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 2002, 1, pp. 20–22; Branislav Gligorijević, 'Ujedinjenje Srpske pravoslavne crkve i uspostavljanje Srpske patrijaršije u Jugoslaviji', *Istorija XX veka*, 15, 1997, 2. pp. 7–18.

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Yugoslavia can be understood in terms of the ultimately achieved ideal of the congruence of Serbian ethnic and political boundaries, similar to the Croatian and Slovene nations' case. Indeed, Yugoslavism was frequently seen, both by contemporaries and modern scholars, as a mask for competing national interests and aims.[150] However, despite representing the majority in the new state, Serbs made up only around 40 per cent of the country's population.[151] In this context, crafting imperial pedigrees and spurring the mythology of Serbian historical statecraft helped justify the political and cultural supremacy of Serbs in a country constitutionally committed to the ethnic equity of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Beyond imperial imagination?

It is beyond doubt that the historiographical construction of the Serbian nation's imperial legacy was pertinent not only to intra-Balkan rivalries and political actions of Serbian elites. Byzantine-Serbian relationships as a subject of national historiography were also highly relevant to the international late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century context, when the 'criteria' of civilization and imperial pedigrees were commonly associated with 'standards' of modern states.[152] The fact that Serbia needed to present itself as a civilized state endowed with a suitable past was a crucial aspect of this historiographical construction. The idea of a restored medieval empire, in which Serbia would represent a core territory with Serbs as a dominant nation, entailed inventing the nation's imperial antecedents even after the process of creating a unified South Slavic state had begun, which went in parallel with the First World War.[153] Yet, despite the official ideology of integral Yugoslavism, the idea of Serbs exercising the most power, control and cultural influence continued to be justified and carefully historicized throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the new Yugoslav context, mainstream Serbian historiography advanced the old theses about Serbian ethnic and cultural dominance in the medieval Balkans and elaborated on Serbo-Byzantine culture as a testament of the

[150] See Rusinow, 'The Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia', pp. 20–21; Pavlowitch, 'The First World War and the Unification of Yugoslavia', p. 28; Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Serbiens*, pp. 240–51.

[151] Ibid., p. 251; Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia: The History Behind the Name*, London, 2002, pp. 113–14; Banac, *National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 58.

[152] See Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilisation: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea*, Chicago, IL, 2009.

[153] See Rusinow, 'The Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia', pp. 11–26; Banac, *National Question in Yugoslavia*, pp. 141–225. See also Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918*, 2 vols, Belgrade, 1989.

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nation's innate ability and perennial commitment to imperial rule. The image crafted by historians about a once-great state, whose progress had been cut off by Turkish invasions in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, became particularly vivid if seen from the perspective of the Serbian national revival in the 1920s and 1930s. This revival was encouraged by the historiographical construction of Serbian primacy in the medieval empire that resonated in the new political context of Yugoslavia, marked by the competing and vitriolic nationalism of Croats and Serbs. Interwar historiography's accounts about a Serbian national past — but also some contemporaneous works dealing with the 'history of Yugoslavia', such as Vladimir Ćorović's — were saturated with the idea that the Serbian 'state-crafting element' was a mainstay of the entire political life of the medieval empire which survived up to modern times.

These ideas formed a kind of continuous ideological backdrop for imagining a new Serbia-centred state and the consequent legitimization of Serbian supremacy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It was only in this new political context that Serbian history served as a means of and justification for Serbian cultural prowess and political power. Portrayed by historians as the principal state builders and imperial heirs, Serbs were predestined to continue their Piedmontal role in the South Slavic world and to become leaders of a new, post-First World War region, stretching their 'state-crafting' aptitudes over and above their ethnic boundaries. Of course, the perspective can be reversed, and if we assume that both the Kingdom of Serbia and the subsequently formed South Slavic state represented 'nation-states' (of Serbs and Yugoslavs respectively), then we can claim they underwent a process of what Alexei Miller and Alfred Rieber have called 'imperializing'.[154] Thus, one can suggest a hypothesis about historical narratives — either implicitly or explicitly — translating the idea of Serbia as a kernel of a new, South Slavic state and of Serbs as empire-builders into a structure of the nation's past. How far these hypothetical inferences prove to be appropriate is an important question open to further scholarship on Serbian interwar political culture.

The ideological discourse of Yugoslavism and the political framework of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with all its ideological complexities, conveniently opened up yet another layer of interpretation of the Byzantine heritage. In contrast with mainstream historical explanations of the exclusively Serbian inheritance of Byzantine culture, this alternative view interpreted the Byzantine heritage as a common legacy of all the nations of

[154] Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, 'Introduction', in *Imperial Rule*, pp. 1–6.

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the Balkans, particularly the South Slav. Part of these integrative narratives — which either sought to construct a common cultural framework for the South Slavs and a historical model of 'peaceful coexistence', or simply to mask predominant nationalistic attitudes — was a process of 'Yugoslavization' of the Byzantine heritage. This was an older nineteenth-century idea, which was given a fillip by the geographer Jovan Cvijić's influential theory of the cultural zones of the Balkan Peninsula.[155] Cvijić made concerted efforts to demonstrate that a 'zone of modified Byzantine civilization' represented a core feature of the whole region, of what he named 'Balkanic culture par excellence'[156] and 'Balkanism' in particular.[157] His accounts stood in stark opposition to mainstream Serbian historiography, which considered Byzantium in relation solely to the Serbian national heritage. In the interwar period, Cvijić's followers, first and foremost Vladimir Dvorniković, employed this scheme in establishing a much-needed Yugoslavian common cultural framework. He propounded a theory of continuity of Byzantine culture and longevity of its unifying civilizational zeal — even though it was simultaneously seen as effete and inferior to the indigenous patriarchal culture of the South Slavs — which was similar to the ideas of Nicolae Iorga and his disciples.[158] He saw the Byzantine heritage as a cohesive bond which was, and should be, established between all South Slavs.[159] According to this schema, Byzantium ought to be understood not as an imperial heritage adopted and perfected solely by medieval Serbs, but a historical paragon of different peoples engulfed by the newly established Yugoslav Kingdom.

Seeing Byzantium as a common cultural legacy of South Slavs — which sharply differed from later ideas of Dimitri Obolensky's about the 'Byzantine Commonwealth' based on the integrative role of Orthodox Christianity[160] — represented an echo of a much broader and older

[155] Jovan Cvijić, 'Kulturni pojasi Balkanskog poluostrva', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 6, 1902, 4, pp. 909–21. For an English summary of Jovan Cvijić's theses, see 'Studies in Jugoslav Psychology', trans. Fanny Foster, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 9, 1930, 26, pp. 375–90.

[156] Cvijić, 'Kulturni pojasi'; Jovan Cvijić, 'The Zones of Civilization of the Balkan Peninsula', *Geographical Review*, 5, 1918, 6, pp. 470–82.

[157] Jovan Cvijić, *Govori i članci*, 4 vols, Belgrade, 1921, 1, p. 91.

[158] See Virgil Candea, 'Introduction,' in Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, pp. 7–23.

[159] Vladimir Dvorniković, 'Psiha jugoslovenske melanholije [1925]', *Delo*, 27, 1991, 9–12, p. 236.

[160] Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, London, 1971; Dimitri Obolensky, 'Byzantium and the Slavic World', in Angeliki E. Liaiou and Henry Maguire (eds), *Byzantium: A World Civilization*, Washington, D.C., pp. 37–48; See also, Paschalis Kitromilides's collection of articles in *An Orthodox Commonwealth:*

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system of interpretation, which was already fully-fledged in pre-First World War historiography, most notably in Stojan Novaković's accounts written simultaneously with the popularization of the Yugoslav idea in the 1910s. Denouncing the 'mistakes of the past' and the atavistic project of a Serbian empire which would justify illegitimate expansionism, Novaković emphasized the irrelevance of nation-states in the Middle Ages and also the prospects of revamping the 'Serbo-Byzantine Empire',[161] opting for a more democratic and inclusive solution to future political cooperation of the Balkan nations. Nonetheless, despite anti-nationalistic rhetoric, his and similar accounts could have further helped challenge a nation-state political framework and encourage imperial enthusiasm simply through the fact that they formed a niche of counter claims that would remain elitist and opposed to mainstream historical imagination.

It was in this new versatile intellectual setting that a new science of 'Balkanology' was founded as a comparativist and inherently anti-nationalistic endeavour of 'studying the Balkan organism'.[162] This 'new science' was initiated by Yugoslav scholars Petar Skok (1881–1956) and Milan Budimir (1891–1975) who established the Institut des Études balkaniques/Balkanski institut in Belgrade in 1934.[163] They saw Byzantium as a common cultural framework and a cohesive historical force which had unified the region culturally in the past. They tried, among other things, to rectify the predominantly nationalistic reading of the Balkan's Byzantine past which they considered an era of a unifying (but not unitary) culture that had nevertheless yielded a sense of unity in diversities.[164] Balkanology undoubtedly reflected intellectuals of the period's attempts to establish a historical basis for a much-needed cultural and political unity against the antagonistic political and national context of Yugoslavia of the late 1930s, as well as the rest of the Balkans. These integrative registers penetrated into interwar Serbian humanities, with the archaeologist Nikola Vulić (1872–1945) being one of its notable representatives. Of course, these

Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe, Aldershot, 2007.

[161] Novaković, '*Nekolika teža pitanja*', pp. 133–37.

[162] Milan Budimir and Petar Skok, 'But et signification des études balkaniques', *Revue internationale des études balkaniques*, 1, 1934, 1, pp. 2–3; Milan Budimir, 'O Balkanu i balkanologiji', in Ratko Parežanin and Borivoje Gavrilović (eds), *Balkanski svet*, Belgrade, 1940, pp. 17–18; Petar Skok, 'Praktična i teorijska važnost balkanologije', in *Balkanski svet*, pp. 15–16.

[163] See Ratko Parežanin, *Za balkansko jedinstvo: osnivanje, program i rad Balkanskog instituta u Beogradu (1934–1941)*, Munich, 1976.

[164] Petar Skok and Milan Budimir, 'Destinées balkaniques', *Revue internationale des études balkaniques*, 2, 1936, 4. pp. 601–13.

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narratives were not confined to Serbia. Similar types of 'medievalized' and confronted national histories began to take a prominent place in national historiographies in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, when historians 'created a basis for looking upon the region as a unit with a common heritage'.[165]

Explanations for the apparent idiosyncrasy of these two coexistent registers of interpretation of the Byzantine heritage lie not as much in the simultaneity of different scholarly traditions as in the ideological underpinnings of history-writing and power relations. Different focuses on Byzantium and its relationship with Serbia pertained to the tension and ambivalence of the constantly re-negotiated national question that preoccupied Serbian political and intellectual elites throughout the 1920s and 1930s and their dilemmas of either upholding a nation-state concept or supporting a supra-national integration (with Serbs representing either a 'core-nation' or nationality equal to any other). Having been adopted either as a national or supra-national heritage, Byzantium was included in Serbian national narratives via simultaneously developed national, imperial or counter-imperial registers of interpretation. Whether representing a superior civilization brought down by internal vices, a culture succeeded and 'refined' by medieval Serbs, or a unifying cultural framework that predated and anticipated a South Slavic cultural unity and/or a trans-national cooperation in the Balkans, Byzantium remained a similarly vexed question for Serbian historians in the 1930s as it had been five decades before.

Yet throughout the entire period, Byzantium was always seen from the standpoint of its decline and inheritance, and always in relation to an 'imperial project' that presupposed and foresaw some kind of unity, either national, territorial or both. The sheer instrumentality of these multivalent historical readings was possible only due to the simultaneity of apparently contradictory, but in fact coherent, justifications for political ambitions and different types of political solutions, be they national, multinational or trans-national. On the other hand, the multifacetedness of Byzantium's historical identity, whose perception included both condemnation and blessing and oscillated between various viewpoints, relied heavily on several interpretive traditions and models of interpretation of the Eastern

[165] Diana Mishkova, 'What is in Balkan History? Spaces and Scales in the Tradition of Southeast-European Studies', *Southeastern Europe*, 34, 2010, pp. 55–86 (p. 71). See also, Maria Todorova, 'My Yugoslavia', in Radmila Gorup (ed.), *After Yugoslavia: The Cultural Spaces of a Vanished Land*, Stanford, CA, 2013, pp. 23–37; Vladimir D. Mihajlović, 'Genius loci Balkani: recepcija prošlosti i konstruisanje akademskog narativa o balkanskom nasledju', *Etnoantropološki problemi*, 8, 2013, 3, pp. 779–803.

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Roman Empire that were adopted and utilized by Serbian historians. As a matter of fact, matters Byzantine in Serbian historiography were not only matters historical, but also a continuation of ideological arguments targeted at the political sphere. The problem discussed in this article shows that a need for a more subtle and context-sensitive understanding of the writings of historians is conducive to understanding interactions between disciplinary traditions, historical contexts and extra-scholarly ramifications.

Although the question of Serbia's 'Byzantine inheritance' remains part of a sustained scholarly interest in the national past it has continued to be vigorously debated. Constantly present in public discourse, it still preoccupies many Serbian historians. More than a century after Stanoje Stanojević's *Byzantium and the Serbs*, similarly conceived explanations of medieval Serbia's cultural association with Byzantium and differentiation from it saturate national historiography. The problems of Byzantine-Serbian cultural links and political encounters lie not only at the heart of the Serbian historical imagination but are also central to the burning questions of national identity and sovereignty, just as they were a century ago.

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